Almighty and Eternal Heavenly Father, we come to thee in humble adoration, realizing that thou art the power behind all power, the spring of life from which all life flows, the reservoir of love and goodness - the source of all human love and goodness. As we gain in knowledge concerning thy universe - its greatness and our smallness we know that only thou art great and limitless.] And as we celebrate the baptism of our infant we know that thou hast perfectly loved us - even before we have realized our love for thee.

Give us a spirit of thankfulness O God; for as we enjoy the privileges and gifts that are ours we all too seldom lift our voices in appreciation to thee

We humbly thank thee for the gift of life itself, recognizing that we exist only in thy love.

We thank thee for the world in which we live, for the changing seasons that make possible regeneration and new life. - For the earth from which comes life giving food, for the wind and rain - for the intricate perfection of nature created by thy hand.

O God we thank thee for our great nation and for the privileges and liberties that we here enjoy; and for those upon whose highest ideals our government is built.

We give thee hearty thanks O God for thy holy church, - for its centuries of witness under every kind of condition. And we thank thee Our Father for our church, in which thou hast called us to labor.

At this time O God we are grateful above all else for thine unspeakable love and concern. In Jesus Christ we see it manifested before our eyes - and in his sacrament [church] we see the possibility of participating in that love - the possibility of receiving redemption and salvation.

As we commune [worship] together [and with thee] we are reminded that all we have, all that we do and all that we are - are wholly dependent on thee. Because of thy grace we live and breathe and carry on our life together. Give us a keen mind and open heart that [in this sacrament] we might more fully know thee.

O thou who art the author of the ideal of Peace on Earth - good will among men - be present in strife torn areas the world over. If it be thy will look with

World Wide Communion Sunday, 1963, - unity seems to be the word of the day. We can be comforted by the thought that on this day Christians all over the world are unified in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. All over the world Christians are gathering at places of worship, and we know they will be doing essentially the same things we are doing; and thinking the same thoughts: Unity, today, is in the air.

And not only today: - for in our generation a great revolution is occurring in Christianity: It's name, which chokes most laymen, is the ecumenical movement. "Ecumenical" comes from a Greek word meaning "house or household", and the movement has gone a long way toward expressing the essential unity of all Christian men. WWC. World Council It has caused most sensitive Christians to reexamine the reasons for their distinct denominations. It has caused theologians to sit down and discover how very little there is that separates Christians by way of theology. And it has provided an atmosphere of friendliness and cooperation BETWEEN LOCAL CHURCHES THAT NOT LONG AGO WERE INVOLVED IN BLATANT competition for men's souls.

The Ecumenical Movement is important: it is not a matter of expedience, or of any other human fancy. For Jesus Christ was concerned about unity. Shortly before his arrest Jesus prayed: and the author of the Fourth Gospel has recorded for us the essence of his prayer. It is a beautiful and moving prayer. The situation is filled with raw drama: Jesus is about to be arrested: his death is immanent and he is aware of it. His disciples are about to betray, deny and desert him: and he is aware of that too. And yet the essence of his prayer is a petition on their behalf. Even though they are about to let him down terribly, he prays that he is glorified in them: they are the ones he has taught and carfully groomed: they are his friends, even though their loyalty is about to wain: they are his disciples and he is proud of them - for in them: in the work they will have to do - he will be glorified.

And then, on behalf of his wavering disciples, he utters one of the most significant petitions in any prayer: ("Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.") A simple phrase: and yet possessed of sharp insight and prophetic vision. A few short years later men were to dispute with each other saying, ("I belong to Paul, and I belong to Peter, and I belong to Appolos, and I belong to Christ.") Fifty years after his crucifixion and resurrection Christians were to be split right down the middle over a theological debate springing from the Gnostic heresy, a syntheses of Christainity and Greek Mysticism. In fact the history of Christianity, the history begun by this group of intimate friends, like the history of all humanity, was to be one long tale of wars, strife, men fighting men. It was to be a story of Reformation and Counter Reformation, of sects, and orders, of denominations and branches. And I think our Lord knew this as he prayed that his disciples be one. When he prayed for unity he was striking an essential, and all too rare chord in the whole history of the Christian Faith.

And so today when Unity is in the air we rejoice: But we also do well to stop and define what we mean. What do we mean by Christian Unity or Ecumenicity? What do we want when we labor for Unity?

I think one of the serious failing of the Ecumenical Movement, and even of such ecumenical celebrations as World Wide Communion, is that it has caused us to overshoot. To draw an analogy, we are like the hunter who zealously fires away at a whole flock of Geese, and in his zeal fails to hit a single goose. I think that in our headlong pursuit of Ecumenicity we, in our enthusiastic desire for Christian Unity, we perhaps bypass and miss a very essential understanding: i.e. that Christian Unity begins at a very unsensational level -- at the level of relationships between individual persons. The practice of Christianity goes on between man and man: Christian love is love for another man: Christian Charity is an act of sacrifice for another person:

Christian forgivenness is a forgiving of another person who has wronged us. But modern Christianity seems bent upon elliminating this iportant interpersoanl aspect form the faith. One of the great ironies of the modern faith is that we delight in broad sweeping generalities, while our Lord dealt in harsh specofics. Jesus worked with interpersonal relations. He preached kindness and concern for the downtrodden and rejected: and then he went out and helped a prostitute up off the street. He preached charity to the poor, and then he went out and rubbed elbows with them, fed them and ate in their homes. He preached forgiveness and then he forgave Peter who had denied even knowing him, and he forgave the men who drove the nails through his feet. But we are satisified to be charitable, and concerned and forgiving at a distance. We are content to love mankind, while hating a lot of men. We are content to be Ecumenical minded about the whole Christian Church: but when our Lord prayed for unity and oneness he referred to a very specific relationship between very specific men. He didn't pray for a vague unity among mankind: he prayed for a precise relationship between this man and this man.

The early Christians are History's shining example of Christian unity. And yet they had no other alternative: their existence depended on their unity. They met in secret: their clandestine meetings, and symbols and sacraments b ound them together in a relationship that was a true brotherhood. They knew what it meant to be of one mind and spirit with a brother. But contrary to the adverse conditions under which C hristian unity flowered, we live in an age when every one is, or thinks he is , a Christian. In our day the Church is not only tolerated, but an essential part of the total cultural structure. In this environment we cannot depend on adverse circumstances to drive us to unity.

We live also, in a culture that has made unity even more distant, because of the forces of isolationism and alienation. Sociologists and Psychologists tell us that we are isolated from our fellow men, that we are alienated from

each other: we are a Lonely Crowd, say those who write books about us: and we are told that the day of concrete, give-and-take, person-to-person relationships is fast disappearing. And in and through it all we have all but lost the essential understanding that the Christian faith operates between me and my neighbor: that things between men are different because of what Jesus Christ has done. Theoretically, Christian men who are strangers, are brothers. bound to each other by a bond of faith and love. Biblically, Christian men are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a true brotherhood. And yet do these Biblical concepts fit the situation as we live it? Do the Biblical ideas of unity bear up under close self examination and scrutiny? ~~I think not.~~ Does our faith make any difference in the way we treat another man? Are we, in this congregation, any more to each other than good friends? Does a stranger in our church, or in any church, know and feel that he is amidst a community of brotthers: a community that is one in thought, mind and spirit: a community of which he is a welcome memeber because of his common faith in Jesus Christ? The Ecumenical movement begins here, at this humble level: Christian unity - even World Wide Communion, derive their significance and meaning from our feeling and understanding here.

We can do no bettee today, then, to recover the basic understanding to which I have been referring: that Christianity begins with our relationships with each other: that World Wide Communion is World Wide only after it is Communion with each other. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has called this recovery the "Breakthrough to Fellowship." ~~This is it~~ This it is - a true breakthrough: a breaking through all the silly and unimportant things that separate us as strangers and a confrontation with our brother: the one for whom our Lord died.

Our Lord prayed for unity between his disciples: and shortly before he prayed he sat with them around a supper table. His words on that occassion again dealth with specific inter-personal relations. ("This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood.") Because of what I am about to do on the cross: You and God may eneter into a new relationship. Because of what I go out now to do - you around this table are bound to each other in a new covenant: a covenant that is sealed with my own blood. Evevry time you sit down together, remeber this covenant: remember your unity in my blood.

It is fitting that on World Wide Communion Sunday we be aware of the cosmic and universal dimension of the Christian Brotherhood. But it is even more fitting that we realize that our Communion is first of all with each other. Today we celebrate and reenact the establishing of a new covenat btween God and man, and between man and man: It is an agreement, sealed with the Blood of Jesus Christ, that binds you and me, and you and the person sitting next to you, together in a new fellowship.

May God grant us his Holy Spirit that our celebration today be World Wide: but more importantly that it clarify and illumine the royal brotherhood: ~~that we share.~~ the unity and the communion that we are about to express and share.

The Invitation

Now let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God, in the UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION, keeping in mind that we here stand before God, not as individuals, but as a brotherhood, aware of our own Failings.